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ABSTRACT

The future of instructional evaluation will probably involve responding to changes in the goals of both teaching and evaluating teachers. The inadequacies of student achievement tests as measures of educational effectiveness will lead to a shift of interest away from tests and toward the abilities of students to solve problems, use learning strategies successfully, and structure knowledge. Examination of the methods teachers use to develop these abilities in students, as well as to motivate students, should be a central feature of evaluation in the future. Evaluation itself can be improved by increasing the amount of data upon which evaluations are based, including data generated by the teachers themselves; developing more reliable systems for obtaining students' responses to instruction; and maintaining a positive tone in evaluations to provide encouragement to teachers. The future of evaluation will also turn on the effects of evaluation processes on institutions in their entirety, including the effects of frequency of evaluation and the effects of evaluating teachers as opposed to curricula. (PGD)

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INSTRUCTIONAL EVALUATION: CURRENT ISSUES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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INSTRUCTIONAL EVALUATION: CURRENT ISSUES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

A recent article by Herbert Marsh in the Journal of Educational Psychology (Marsh, 1984) is an excellent summary of what we currently know about instructional evaluation, particularly the use of student ratings in instructional evaluation. It is clear that a great deal of progress has been made in the last two decades and that we know a good deal more than is used. Have we now run ourselves out of business? Are the basic questions answered so that this line of research can be put aside while others are explored? These are the questions I shall address. I want to speak first to the question, "What do we evaluate". And second, to the question, "How can we improve the effectiveness of instructional evaluation?"

What Do We Evaluate?

Current developments in cognitive and instructional psychology, and in motivation theory have implications for thinking about evaluation of instructional effectiveness as well as for additions or changes in current questions that are used on student rating forms. In the past we have taken as our ultimate criterion of teaching effectiveness, measures of student

learning. We have typically used as criteria end-of-the-course examinations designed by faculty members to assign grades to students. I have spoken before of the inadequacies of such measures both because they are insensitive, in that students are likely to compensate for poor instruction by studying harder in order to achieve the grades to which they aspire, and also because achievement tests typically measure the lower level objectives, such as memory of facts and definitions, rather than higher level outcomes such as critical thinking or problem solving. Today cognitive and instructional psychologists are placing more and more emphasis upon the importance not only of knowledge, but also of the way in which knowledge is structured and upon learning strategies, problem solving strategies and processes involved in learning. Thus it becomes even clearer that our assessment of instruction should look to these kinds of outcomes as criteria. How can we assess these outcomes? I suggested at the AERA a year ago that we might include items on our student rating forms having to do with students' self-perceptions of their gains in these areas and that we might also ask students to assess the degree to which they actively thought about course materials and worked to organize and relate the materials of the course. I still believe that obtaining such student reactions is an appropriate strategy, but it poses a task for researchers in terms of validating student perceptions of their activities and growth in these dimensions.

The cognitive approach also suggests that we need to look more at non-classroom activities of teachers - the ways in which teachers plan student activities and assignments to help them develop the kinds of learning and thinking strategies that we now wish to emphasize; we need to assess the degree to which teachers are using appropriate resources both of technology and experiential learning in achieving these objectives; we need to evaluate the degree to which teachers help students become aware, in a meta-cognitive sense, of their own strategies and thinking.

Motivation theory suggests that we look at the impact of courses upon students' sense of self-efficacy and upon attributions for academic success or failure. It seems clear that long-term interest in further learning and perseverance in learning depends upon the degree to which students see themselves as capable of learning and of possessing skills and strategies which enable them to cope with difficulties in learning. Here we encounter the paradoxical problem that a successful teacher may be one who gives students the sense that their success in his or her class is dependent upon their own effort and skill rather than upon the teacher's skill.

How Can We Improve the Effectiveness of Instructional Evaluation?

The research in cognitive and motivational psychology also has implications for our use of instructional evaluation in helping teachers change. Just as we try to help students develop an awareness of their own learning and problem solving strategies, we need to help teachers become more aware of the ways in which they plan, make decisions, and handle problems arising in their teaching. Previously we have looked primarily at the ways in which we affect teacher behavior with feedback from student ratings. Now we need to think about ways in which our instructional evaluation helps teachers conceptualize their roles, how evaluation affects teachers' sense of personal efficacy as teachers, and whether or not the techniques of instructional evaluation raise or reduce anxiety about teaching that may influence teachers' willingness to devote energy to improvement of instruction.

I think we have some clues as to things that will help here. The research of Aleamoni (Aleamoni, 1978; Stevens and Aleamoni, 1985) and by our own group at Michigan (McKeachie, Lin and Tucker, 1980) on the use of consultation offers fairly convincing evidence that a supportive counselor can improve the use of data from instructional evaluation. Doyle (1983) developed printed feedback providing information beyond that contained in simple rating distributions. Bob Wilson's book of

ideas suggesting alternative methods of teaching to deal with deficiencies revealed by student ratings seems likely to be effective (Davis, Wood, and Wilson, 1983). A self-prepared dossier as an aid to consideration of the faculty member's case for promotion may also be useful in influencing faculty thinking about teaching and learning. All of these appear to be helpful. We need to assess ways in which they can be made to be more helpful.

While I have talked primarily about effectiveness in instructional evaluations for improving teaching, I think that there is still a good deal to do with respect to instructional evaluation for personnel uses. I like Chris Knapper's suggestion (oral communication) that we need to broaden the sources of data to include a dossier which assesses the teacher's goals and adds to the information available to decision makers not only self-perceptions of faculty members but also evidence that might not otherwise be obtained by a personnel committee or administrator making a decision about the future of a faculty member. It seems to me particularly critical that we minimize errors of judgment, and errors are generally less likely if additional data are available. However it is not enough that the data be presented. We need to learn more about what combinations of data are most valid and most cost effective, since almost all data involve additional costs of faculty or student time. In addition we need to see how data are used. I suspect that in

many institutions the problem is not a lack of data but rather the ineffective use of the data available. Certainly in the studies we have done on the use of student ratings and personnel decisions, it is clear that most of the faculty members participating in committees making such decisions espouse giving greater weight to teaching than is evidenced by their own behavior. We found that we can increase the weight somewhat by including comments in addition to statistics of student ratings, (McKeachie, Lin and Tucker, 1984) but we need additional research on ways in which we can not only increase the validity of rating teaching but also increase their credibility and impact upon decision making.

We also need to think about effects of any evaluation system upon the teachers. Evaluation carries a threat, in that evaluations always have the possibility of coming out with judgments less favorable then an individual had hoped for or expected. I've argued that we should not try to normalize the generally favorable ratings of teaching since faculty members are more likely to be motivated to improve if they believe that there is hope for them rather than if the data convey a sense of hopelessness. Improvement is more likely to build upon a sense of previous accomplishment than upon a sense of despair.

The future of instructional evaluation will also put increasing emphasis upon effects upon the institution. We need to look at the impact of a system of instructional evaluation upon the general morale, cohesiveness and work norms of faculty members. It is quite possible to have a system of instructional evaluation which is technically sound and yet creates anxiety, distrust, and lowered effectiveness for a faculty.

We also need to look at the impact of regular numerous evaluations on students and teachers as a whole. As we find more and more institutions requiring that faculty members collect ratings at the end of every course every semester, there is a danger that the data obtained from students will be less thoughtful and helpful and that the impact upon teachers will be less then if evaluations were collected at points where they were likely to be perceived as being particularly meaningful. We need to do more with information collected early in the term and less with evaluations at the end of terms. We need to go beyond student evaluations as our primary source of data to techniques such as group interviews, peer visitation, student representatives, or other devices which will enable faculty members to explore teaching in more depth than is provided by a statistic on a student rating scale.

We also need to look at evaluations of teaching in relation to the general problem of evaluating instructional programs. We can do a good deal in affecting the teaching of a particular

faculty member in a particular course, but this may have less impact upon students' learning then the total impact of a well-conceived or ill-conceived curriculum.

To summarize, I believe that the future of instructional evaluation will involve changes in the goals of teaching and evaluation -- changes in goals from simple factual knowledge to higher order cognitive process, changes from an emphasis upon simply feeding back student or administrative ratings to an emphasis upon cognitive, motivational, and behavioral changes in faculty members; and changes from consideration of effects upon individual faculty members to effects upon institutions as a whole.

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